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Aldermen quiz top cop

Quinn, Tabares want more police

By Tim Hadac

The three aldermen representing Clearing and Garfield Ridge joined their colleagues earlier this month in staging a rare revolt against Mayor Lori Lightfoot, who continues to insist her administration is on top of crime in Chicago.

Led by 15th Ward Ald. Raymond Lopez, half of the City Council's 50 members called for a special meeting on July 2 to hear from Police Supt. David Brown about his plans to ensure public safety this summer across the city.

Among those aldermen were Marty Quinn (13th), Edward M. Burke (14th) and Silvana Tabares (23rd).

At the meeting, Brown was feisty and disputed Lopez's assertion that Chicago has become "a city of war zones."

Brown was flanked by members of his CPD command staff, most notably First Deputy Supt. Eric Carter and Chief of Patrol Brian McDermott.

The successful call for a special meeting was seen by some as a rebuke of the Lightfoot Administration, at least regarding public safety.

The meeting began on a

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Police Supt. David Brown listens as 13th Ward Ald. Marty Quinn (inset) presses the superintendent for specifics on CPD staffing levels. – *Screenshot from a City of Chicago livestream*

QUIZ

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confrontational note, with Brown claiming the meeting was cutting into valuable CPD time that could be used to plan the department's response to recent gang shootings. He went so far as to imply that if anyone is injured or killed in any retaliatory gang shootings, aldermen would be at least in part to blame.

That comment drew a rebuke from Lopez.

"How dare you try to use that on us," the alderman said. "You are here because there is a crisis in our neighborhoods that has not been answered to the liking of our residents. We know the violence that's in our streets. We know what happens—and to say that an entire department cannot function because the three of you are here is outrageous. It's insulting.

"Yesterday, we had over a dozen people shot—three children, one of my neighbors shot right in front of my house, checked by gang members," Lopez continued. "We know, and live it every single day. And if you have time for press conferences, you have to meet with us, too."

Lopez also said Chicago "has gone from being a city of neighborhoods to a city of war zones," an assertion echoed by several other aldermen in various ways during the meeting, which lasted about six hours. A number of aldermen used their allotted time to complain about what they said was a strategy by Brown to drain resources away from neighborhoods to ensure that the Loop and specifically the Mag Mile were flooded with police.

Quinn, Tabares quiz Brown

"My community supports the police," Quinn told Brown. "They support the police in a big way. They want to see more police."

Brown told Quinn that his most pressing need right now is to fill vacant positions to bolster ranks. But when pressed by Quinn on how many vacancies currently exist, Brown would not offer a specific number and only said "several hundred."

Quinn said he thinks CPD should hire 2,000 additional police officers. With Brown's boss, the mayor, standing above and behind him on the dais, the superintendent would not say he agreed with Quinn.

Tabares also noted that residents of her ward are pro-law enforcement. She pressed Brown on the issue of him cancelling scheduled days off and making 12-hour shifts mandatory for frontline police. She said she is concerned about the quality of policing suffering when officers are overworked and fatigued.

Curiously, Brown responded by implying that frontline officers support having their days off cancelled and being compelled to work 12-hour shifts, because officers on the frontlines "would rather have more, not fewer" police working with them, as a safety issue.

Brown added that he only makes the move around select holidays, including Memorial Day, Independence Day and Labor Day.

Brown's move has been roundly criticized by frontline officers, as well as Fraternal Order of Police Chicago Lodge 7 President John Catanzara, who last month likened the mandatory 12-hour shifts to Lightfoot and Brown giving their middle fingers to police officers.

Catanzara also noted that Brown did not object to Lightfoot's 2021 city budget, which eliminated 614 CPD vacant positions.

"This superintendent, who claimed to be all about patrol and wellness, robbed every district of manpower to create a citywide unit of over 1,000 members," he added.

Quinn, Burke and Tabares were among those aldermen who did not vote for Lightfoot's budget last fall.

Marathon meeting wraps up

Some of those praising police are the same aldermen who have publicly agreed with calls to defund the police. Whether their July 2 statements reflect a change of mind or simply political posturing remains to be seen.

Brown echoed Lightfoot's statements when he blamed much of crime in Chicago on Cook County State's Attorney Kim Foxx and Cook County Circuit Court Presiding Judge Timothy Evans—although he did not call out either one by name. He implied Foxx is soft on crime and that Evans has failed to reopen courts as quickly as he should.

In the end, the meeting acquired something of a conciliatory tone, with Brown and the aldermen pledging to work together to find solutions to crime in the city. But several days later, in the wake of the street violence around the July 4 weekend, Lopez called for Brown's resignation.

'Somebody has to lead'

Lightfoot had described the meeting as little more than a political stunt designed to embarrass her, and she accused Burke of orchestrating it through Lopez.

City residents outside the Jewel-Osco at 54th and Pulaski saw it differently.

"Look, crime is out of control in most of the city," said Eliseo Magallanes. "Somebody has to lead, because the mayor sure ain't getting the job done. I don't care who was behind this [special meeting]. I'm just encouraged to see some aldermen standing up to the mayor, finally."

Beatris Rangel said she is "so disappointed in Mayor Lightfoot. I voted for her and had such high hopes for her as the first woman of color to be in charge in this city. But all that hope disappeared after seeing how she let criminals, rioters and looters run free last year. She comes across as someone in over her head, someone with no idea what to do about crime, so she starts blaming everyone but herself. We need someone new as mayor, and I hope someone new, someone strong steps forward in 2023—like Ray Lopez or Silvana Tabares or someone like that."

Juan Quintana said he is displeased "with just about everyone in power in this city. The mayor and her police chief abuse the police on the front lines, throwing them under the bus. Kim Foxx is clearly on the side of criminals. Most of these aldermen are cowards... no backbones, useless. The news media goes along with it all because they are afraid of calling out the gangs. In this city, we have a situation that is approaching chaos. Hopefully out of that, a strong leader will emerge. I don't see it yet, but I hope it happens."

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